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German Foreign Minister to Visit Russian City of Volgograd for War Commemoration

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German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

BERLIN — German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier will travel on May 7 to the Russian city of Volgograd — formerly known as Stalingrad — to commemorate the end of World War II, a ministry spokeswoman said Sunday.

The visit to the site where Soviet forces defeated Nazi troops in one of the bloodiest battles in the history of warfare comes amid strained ties between Russia and Germany over the Ukraine crisis.

Russia will hold a parade in Moscow on May 9 to mark the 70th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany, an opportunity to demonstrate military prowess and vaunt national pride; but most Western leaders are staying away.

It was not clear if Steinmeier would attend that event.

Germany will exclude Russia from a summit of leaders of industrial powers in Bavaria in June. On Saturday, government sources said they would bar members of a Russian motorcycle club allied to Russian President Vladimir Putin from entering the country (see story, this page).

Volgograd, known as Stalingrad from 1925 to 1961, has become a symbol for Russians of patriotic sacrifice and unity. Spiegel Online said Steinmeier would meet his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov during the trip.

Steinmeier, with Chancellor Angela Merkel, has played a leading role in trying to defuse the crisis in Ukraine and negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict — efforts that have put him frequently at odds with Putin.

"Germany, once the instigator of disorder, must now be the one in particular who brings order," Steinmeier told Spiegel Online.

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